United Nations A/C.5/53/SR.53

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 53rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 23 March 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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99-80326 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

The meeting was suspended at 10 a.m. and resumed at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 117: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/53/826, A/53/827 and A/53/833)

1. **The Chairman** proposed that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

> "*The General Assembly*,
>
> "*Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/53/826) and the report of the Secretary-General on improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/53/827);
>
> "*Decides to transmit* the report of the Secretary-General on the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services (A/53/833) to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for consideration in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, taking into account the views expressed by Member States."

2. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 118: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/53/11/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1)

3. **Mr. Ayoub** (Iraq) said that the role and recommendations of the Committee on Contributions were technical in nature, and that it was not part of its function to become involved in political matters. It appeared, however, that its refusal to grant the request for exemption submitted by his country, alone of nine such requests, was the result of political factors dictated by one or two of its members, despite the fact that that request had been based on Article 19, which permitted exemption where the non-payment of contributions was due to considerations beyond the control of the country concerned.

4. It was regrettable that some Member States placed their own political interests ahead of the principles and wording of the Charter. Others, in contrast, had rightly recognized that the burdens which his country had to bear were affecting its ability to pay its contributions to the United Nations. Since 1995 his delegation had been endeavouring by every legitimate means to secure exemption from the application of Article 19 of the Charter until the sanctions were lifted. Those efforts, however, had been thwarted by that same faction, which, for all its incessant prating on about democracy, was bent on denying his country the full exercise of its rights at the United Nations, and was thereby undermining the Organization's credibility.

5. **Mr. Cho Chang-Beom** (Republic of Korea) endorsed the recommendations made by the Committee on Contributions and expressed satisfaction at the Committee's timely and professional work, which was in accordance with the procedure laid down in rule 160 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

6. The Republic of Korea supported the strengthening of the application of Article 19 of the Charter and of rule 160 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. While it supported the intent of the exemption clause in the case of Member States which, for reasons beyond their control, were not in a position to pay their assessed contributions, given the Organization's current financial difficulties a stringent standard should be applied when considering requests for exemption. Any exemptions should be of limited duration and requests should be reviewed on their merits. The Committee should have access to the fullest possible information when considering requests for exemption.

7. His delegation was concerned at the finding that many Member States regularly paid only just enough to retain or regain their votes. Such a practice did not accord with the Charter obligation of Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions.

8. **Mr. Etuket** (Chairman of the Committee on Contributions) said that the Committee on Contributions had considered the case of Cambodia on the basis of the information which had been provided by the Government of Cambodia and by the Secretariat, including Cambodia's stated intention to make the necessary payments to the United Nations by June 1999. The Committee had concluded that Cambodia's current failure to pay the necessary amount to avoid the application of Article 19 was due to conditions beyond its control. Accordingly, it had recommended that Cambodia should be permitted to vote in the General Assembly until 30 June 1999.

9. Some members of the Fifth Committee had requested the Committee on Contributions to review certain aspects of the application of Article 19. The Committee would do so at its fifty-ninth session and submit its recommendations to the General Assembly.

10. **The Chairman** proposed that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

"*The General Assembly*,

"*Having considered* the report of the Committee on Contributions at its special session, decides:

"(a) That the failure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Georgia to pay the amount necessary to avoid the application of Article 19 of the Charter is due to conditions beyond their control and that, accordingly, they should be permitted to vote until 30 June 1999 and that any extension requested should be subject to review by the Committee on Contributions;

"(b) That the failure of the Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras and Nicaragua to pay the amount necessary to avoid the application of Article 19 of the Charter is due to conditions beyond their control and that, accordingly, they should be permitted to vote until 30 June 2000 and that any extension requested should be subject to review by the Committee on Contributions."

11. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

12. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), replying to questions raised earlier by delegations, said that the staff of the Office of Central Support Services had checked all the telephones located outside the conference rooms. Two of them bore tags indicating that they were out of order, but were in fact working. The handsets of two other telephones had been found to be missing and had been replaced. While his staff would continue to make periodic checks, it would also be helpful if delegations reported non-working telephones.

13. With regard to complaints that unauthorized vehicles were being parked in those areas of the garage normally reserved for diplomatic vehicles, he apologized for the disruption which the ongoing construction in the garage had caused. Everything possible was being done, however, to minimize the disruption, including the ticketing of vehicles that were parked without authorization. It should also be remembered that some vehicles which belonged to diplomatic missions but did not have diplomatic licence plates had been granted permits to park in the area normally reserved for diplomatic vehicles.

14. The escalators in the Secretariat building had been installed over fifty years previously and, even though they had been upgraded in compliance with the New York City building codes, they now needed periodic repairs and were therefore taken out of service for short periods each month.

15. The security officer who had been posted permanently in the archives area had been removed because of the increased demand on the resources of the Security and Safety Service. Alternative and cost-effective arrangements had, however, been made to provide security for the area.

16. The staffing table of the Security and Safety Service consisted of 3 Professional staff, 9 General Service staff and 171 security officers. The vacancy rate was 1.5 per cent. Printing costs in the Service were incurred for the printing of such miscellaneous items as inspection tags for fire extinguishers.

17. The canine unit had been introduced at Headquarters in December 1998 on a trial basis, following the delivery of a spate of letter bombs to the Organization. Because of the urgency of the situation, the unit had been contracted on a sole-sourcing basis, as the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) had recommended. A competitive bidding process would take place in the near future. The annual cost of the service, which was provided for 10 hours each day from Monday to Friday, was $150,000. It would cost the Organization $250,000 per year to provide the same service in-house, since two trained dogs would have to be acquired and two officers who were also explosives experts assigned to them on a full-time basis.

18. Given the sensitive nature of the subject of security, he hoped that any further explanations which delegations might need could be provided on a bilateral basis.

19. **Ms. Incera** (Costa Rica) said that her delegation was not satisfied with the explanations just given by the Assistant Secretary-General. The estimate of how much it would cost to provide the canine service in-house, for example, would decline after the initial training period. Also, she had previously been told that the escalators had been replaced since their installation fifty years earlier. It was difficult to know which information was accurate and which was not.

20. **Ms. Emerson** (Portugal) said that the matters currently under consideration should be discussed on a bilateral basis so that the Committee would have enough time to address the substantive items on its agenda.

21. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for his replies to the questions raised by his delegation. He hoped that the issues raised would receive the attention of the Office of Central Support Services on an ongoing basis and not only when specific requests were made by delegations.

22. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation had taken note of the Assistant Secretary-General's explanation that a security officer could no longer be stationed in the archives area because of budget reductions and would take that fact into account during the negotiations on the budget for the following biennium. It would be useful if the Assistant Secretary-General could issue in writing the information which he had just provided.

23. **Ms. Incera** (Costa Rica) said that some of the issues under discussion were best considered in plenary meeting and not on a bilateral basis, as was being suggested. She, too, would find it useful if the Assistant Secretary-General issued in a written document the oral replies which he had just given.

24. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) said that new escalators had not been installed in the Secretariat building. He would prefer, where possible, to provide any additional information that members might need on a bilateral basis.

25. **Mr. Jaremczuk** (Poland) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for his efforts to improve the security situation at Headquarters.

26. **The Chairman** requested the Assistant Secretary-General to make his replies available in writing for the benefit of delegations and reminded members that the Secretariat and Committee were both on the same team. In view of the limited time available, every effort should be made to group issues for discussion in formal meetings under an appropriate agenda item in order to streamline the Committee's work.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.

United Nations A/C.5/53/SR.54

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 54th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 31 March 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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99-80427 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/53/849; A/C.5/53/L.44)

Management irregularities causing financial losses to the Organization

1. **The Chairman** said that, since neither the Secretariat nor the Advisory Committee had so far provided the information requested in connection with the Secretary-General's report on management irregularities causing financial losses to the Organization (A/53/849), he would take it that the Committee wished to defer consideration of the question to the second part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

2. *It was so decided.*

Procurement-related arbitration

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.44

3. **Mr. Armitage** (Australia) introduced the draft resolution. While it had not proved possible to reach agreement on a draft resolution on procurement reform, consensus had been reached in informal consultations on the paragraphs dealing with procurement-related arbitration. Since that constituted a separate and clearly differentiated question, a separate draft resolution should be adopted. He trusted that the draft resolution could be adopted by consensus.

4. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.44 was adopted.*

5. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the members of the Group attached great importance to procurement by the Organization. A transparent procurement system, based on the principle of equality of opportunity for suppliers, was of obvious economic benefit. Although it would have been better to have concluded the negotiations, time constraints and the complexity of the issue had made it necessary to defer to the second part of the resumed session the conclusion of the informal consultations on the formulation of a draft resolution to promote further improvement in the work of the Procurement Division. In the consultations the Rio Group had actively promoted the principle of equal opportunity, and thanked delegations, from both developed and developing countries, for their support for its proposals. It also wished to thank Central Support Services and the Procurement Division for the information supplied and stressed the importance of information to transparent decision-making. The Group would continue its constructive approach to the question when it was taken up again.

Procurement reform

6. **The Chairman** said that he would take it that, owing to time constraints, the Committee wished to defer consideration of procurement reform to the second part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

7. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 113: Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999 (*continued*) (A/C.5/53/L.41 and A/C.5/53/L.42)

Integrated Management Information System

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.41

8. **The Chairman** introduced the draft resolution and suggested that it should be adopted by consensus.

9. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.41 was adopted.*

Development Account

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.42

10. **Mr. Kabir** (Bangladesh) introduced the draft resolution. Paragraph 1 would approve four of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the utilization of the development dividend (A/53/374). Approval of the proposals was being proposed on an ad hoc and one-time basis, without setting a precedent and without prejudicing the outcome of consideration of other elements relating to the Development Account. He recommended that the draft resolution should be adopted by consensus.

11. **Mr. Lozinsky** (Russian Federation) said that he had no objection to the adoption of the draft resolution by consensus; that would not only permit activities to be begun in practice but also permit agreement to be reached on how the Account was to be utilized. He asked the Secretariat to confirm that it intended to prepare and issue in due course a conference room paper reflecting the agreements reached on the budgetary aspects of the question. All delegations must be in a position to study those aspects in detail so that the negotiations could continue.

12. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that approval of the four proposals would allow the resources available under section 34 of the programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999 to be used. The Secretary-General, when implementing the approved projects, must take full account of established budgetary procedures and practices and of the Financial Regulations and Rules, as indicated in the draft

resolution, which also reaffirmed General Assembly resolutions 52/220 and 52/221. She looked forward to the provision of information by the Secretariat to permit the renewal, and perhaps conclusion, of consideration of the sustainability, mechanism and modalities of the Development Account.

13. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the document referred to by the representative of the Russian Federation would be submitted to the Fifth Committee at the second part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly as a report of the Secretary-General.

14. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.42 was adopted.*

15. **Mr. Barnwell** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that he attached great importance to the Development Account. Although he was pleased with the progress made, he regretted that it had not been possible to conclude consideration of the question, mainly because there had not been enough time to consider the sustainability and establishment of the mechanisms and modalities of the Account. He anticipated that full consideration would be given to those issues at the second part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly. The Group of 77 and China looked forward to the early reformulation of the Secretary-General's proposals on the utilization of the development dividend on the basis of the guidelines set out in paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the draft resolution just adopted, so that a decision could be taken on the implementation of those projects.

16. **Mr. Küntzle** (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, said that the European Union had from the outset supported the concept of the Development Account proposed by the Secretary-General. On the basis of the views expressed by the Advisory Committee, the European Union supported the Secretary-General's proposals on funding mechanisms for the Account and the utilization of the development dividend. In December 1997 the General Assembly had appropriated $13.1 million for projects and activities to be financed from the Development Account in the biennium 1998-1999. However, the General Assembly, very late in the biennium, had only now agreed to release part of the funds for a limited number of the projects proposed by the Secretary-General. Nevertheless, he welcomed the draft resolution just adopted. The European Union had consistently argued that proposed activities should have suitable objectives, measurable outcomes and clear performance indicators, and that they should complement existing programmes. The draft resolution just adopted requested the Secretary-General, *inter alia*, to reformulate some of the proposals contained in his report on the utilization of the development dividend. As recommended by the Advisory Committee, that would allow indicators to be further delineated, and to include a description of the situation before the projects were implemented. Otherwise neither Member States nor the Secretariat would be in a position to fully measure accomplishments.

17. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Group welcomed the fact that the Development Account had started to become a reality. While Member States had expressed support for only four of the proposals submitted to the Assembly by the Secretary-General, he trusted that those projects would help to promote development. The Rio Group looked forward to the submission of the proposals requested in paragraph 5 of the draft resolution adopted; any reformulation should take the Latin America and Caribbean region into account.

18. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand), speaking on behalf of the delegations of Australia and Canada in addition to her own, welcomed the draft resolution just adopted by the Committee as the first substantive resolution on the Development Account since the General Assembly had endorsed the concept in its resolution 52/12 B. She regretted, however, the fact that the Committee was still far from accepting the Secretary-General's reform proposal on the Development Account. The three delegations had supported the concept of the Development Account from the outset and would continue to give unconditional support to the Secretariat in its efforts to promote increased administrative efficiency and apply the savings thus generated to economic and social priorities. They thus endorsed the Committee's decision to return to the question in what remained of the session. At that time it would be necessary to reach agreement on how the Development Account would be maintained and sustained in future. Political will and flexibility on the part of all would be needed to that end, otherwise the risk would arise of wasting the valuable time available to the Committee at the May resumed session, which had traditionally been devoted to in-depth analysis of questions relating to peacekeeping.

19. As the CANZ delegations had indicated in the negotiations leading up to adoption of the draft resolution, it would have been preferable for the Committee to have approved all the development projects proposed by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. That would have utilized all the $13 million in the Development Account for the current biennium and would have allowed immediate

implementation of the eight projects. It was unfortunate that the Committee had been unable to reach agreement, thus preventing the United Nations from providing immediate assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition. She trusted that when the remaining four projects were reformulated as requested in paragraph 5 of the draft resolution the Committee would approve them without further delay. The Committee had begun its deliberations on the Development Account in March 1998, and one year later had only reached agreement on the utilization of 50 per cent of the funds available in the Account. That was not good enough and greater efforts would have to be made to support the Secretary-General's reform and strengthening of the United Nations in accordance with the consensus agreement on General Assembly resolution 52/12 B.

20. **Ms. Castellanos-González** (Guatemala) said that her delegation endorsed the statements by the Group of 77 and China and the Rio Group and agreed with the general view that an increasing proportion of the Organization's budget should be devoted to purposes directly related to development. To the extent that the Development Account could contribute to that end, her delegation would consider the scope of the Account and its operational modalities with interest. The establishment of the Account should provide an incentive for United Nations administrators and Member States to use all savings generated through greater efficiency for development purposes rather than for additional budget cuts. Looking to the future and maintaining its commitment to the projects already approved, her delegation would offer full support for any specific project designed to help the most depressed areas on the American continent, in particular for the development of populations which had been affected by natural disasters and were in need of such resources.

21. **Mr. Takahara** (Japan) said that his delegation had always attached great importance to the Development Account and was grateful to the representative of Bangladesh for having coordinated the negotiations on the item and achieved a positive outcome. There was still a need to continue to review the mechanisms and modalities of the Development Account so as to reach agreement on how to utilize the remainder of the development dividend. His delegation trusted that that process would be conducted in a constructive spirit of cooperation, and was willing to assist in that regard.

22. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) thanked the representative of Bangladesh for his tireless efforts in guiding the negotiations on the Development Account. Her delegation had long supported the concept of utilizing savings generated by efficiency measures to fund the Organization's priority activities, including those relating to development. She was fully ready to support the eight initial projects, which taken together would make a modest contribution to efforts to promote full and effective access to the worldwide web. Nevertheless, her delegation remained of the view that other committees with technical expertise should consider decisions relating to the substance of the proposed projects and that the Fifth Committee should confine itself to the administrative and financial aspects of the Account.

23. Regrettably, it had not been possible to reach agreement on the eight projects, only four of which had been selected, so that the adoption of a decision on the use of funds already appropriated for high priority development activities had again been deferred. Pending reformulation by the Secretary-General of the other four projects, the activities proposed and approved in connection with the Development Account must have clearly defined objectives and specific, measurable performance indicators. That criterion, which was in full accord with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, as recently revised, was essential so that Member States and Secretariat officials could determine whether or not project objectives had been attained. Besides deferring consideration of the projects, the Committee had also postponed consideration of the modalities of the Development Account; those delays could only increase the pressure on the Committee's programme of work at the resumed session in May. It was improbable that the workload could be handled in May, bearing in mind the little that had been accomplished in March. A further cause for concern was that that situation impacted on the Committee's ability to devote the necessary time and effort to the various questions relating to peacekeeping, traditionally taken up at that part of the resumed session.

24. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and thanked the representative of Bangladesh for his coordination efforts. Under the draft resolution just adopted, the proposals would be reformulated and implemented in accordance with the relevant regulations of the Organization; the Committee must take account of those regulations and of established budgetary procedure in its further consideration of the question, given that the Development Account formed part of the regular budget.

25. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of

Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and had joined the consensus on the draft resolution on the Development Account just adopted by the Committee. Once again the Committee had been unable to conclude its consideration of the question, in particular with respect to the modalities and sustainability of the Development Account, despite the readiness and political will of the members of the Group of 77 and China to deal substantively with the issue. The draft resolution adopted should be fully implemented; his delegation firmly believed that establishment of the Development Account would be of benefit to developing countries.

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 119: Human resources management (*continued*) (A/C.5/53/L.43)

Gratis personnel provided by Governments

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.43

26. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.43 on gratis personnel provided by Governments, drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 4, which made reference to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The Secretary-General's report (A/53/715) referred to the recruitment of 17 gratis personnel by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Accordingly, the words "and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda" in lines 2 and 3 of paragraph 4 should be deleted. She trusted that the Committee would adopt the draft resolution, as amended, without a vote.

27. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) asked for clarification by the Secretariat of two points. In paragraph 2, the General Assembly would reiterate the need for full compliance with its resolutions on gratis personnel, in which connection he asked whether it was intended to issue the reports requested in General Assembly resolution 51/243, paragraphs 6 and 9. Secondly, at the formal meeting at which the item had been introduced, the Secretariat had stated that it had noted the comments and observations of the Advisory Committee, including the observation referred to in paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, and questions had arisen with respect to the comments made by the Advisory Committee in its report (A/53/417/Add.1) on seeking prior concurrence from the Assembly or, if it were not in session, from the Advisory Committee. Specifically, the question had been asked of what provision that observation had been made on the basis of, and on the basis of what criterion the Secretariat would have to take note of it. In the view of his delegation, in exceptional circumstances only the General Assembly could give approval, in accordance with its resolution 52/234, paragraph 18. He asked for clarification of those two points before action was taken on the draft resolution.

28. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) thanked the representative of the Philippines for acting as coordinator. Her delegation had noted all the questions raised in the informal consultations. Since the draft resolution reaffirmed General Assembly resolution 51/243 and bearing in mind the decision by the Assembly to keep under review the question of gratis personnel, she sought confirmation from the Secretariat that the quarterly and annual reports to the Assembly would be submitted in the following sessions to provide a basis for consideration of the question. Further, she noted with concern the confirmation in the Advisory Committee's report that, in the majority of cases, the functions that were being performed by gratis personnel should have been performed by Secretariat staff. It was important for recruitment practices to be improved in accordance with the rules to avoid such occurrences.

29. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management), responding to questions raised by the representatives of Pakistan and Cuba, said that when the Assembly requested quarterly and annual reports, the reports would be issued. With regard to the question raised by the representative of Pakistan, if exceptional circumstances arose the approval of the General Assembly would be sought.

30. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.43, as orally amended, was adopted.*

31. **Mr. Bond** (United States of America) thanked the representative of the Philippines for her tireless efforts and ingenuity in bringing about consensus on the question of gratis personnel which, as stated by his own and other delegations in other forums, was finished with. As indicated in the draft resolution adopted, with the exception of one individual, all type II gratis personnel had been phased out of the Secretariat and the tribunals. For that the Secretary-General deserved the commendation of the Assembly. The Secretary-General's decision to maintain one gratis personnel in the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia had caused an excessive reaction on the part of some delegations. He fully believed that the Secretary-General had followed the only course possible. Replacement of lawyers in mid-trial would, at best, have led to difficulties, and might have resulted in a mistrial, with all the ensuing consequences. Taking into account the exceptional nature of the Tribunal's obligations, he welcomed the steps taken by the Secretary-General to

comply with the resolutions of the General Assembly while ensuring procedural safeguards and observing legal norms. The General Assembly must give the Secretary-General enough management flexibility to ensure that judicial procedure at the tribunals did not suffer irreparable harm.

Human resources management

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.45

32. **Mr. Armitage** (Australia), coordinator of the informal consultations on the draft resolution, introduced it with the following oral amendments: deletion of the square brackets around section IV, paragraph 5; in section IX, the first alternative text of paragraph 4 was deleted, and the second alternative, without square brackets and with some amendments, was retained. The final version of the paragraph read: "*Requests* the Secretary-General, when submitting future reports on the composition of the Secretariat, to discontinue the established practice of showing representation of staff according to major geographical groupings as referred to in annex II of his report and to list countries in alphabetical order;". Lastly, paragraph 5 of section IX was deleted and the remaining paragraphs renumbered.

33. The draft resolution, in its 12 parts, covered all aspects of the management of human resources. He drew the Committee's attention to section V, paragraphs 9, 10 and 11, on the appointment of a number of gratis personnel to the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Specific emphasis had been placed on the words "current contracts", in recognition of the fact that the provisions of paragraph 26 of section III.B of resolution 51/226 constituted only a temporary restriction. The guiding principle had been to avoid disruption of the work of the Tribunal. Further, with regard to paragraph 4 of section IX, reports on the composition of the Secretariat would no longer refer to major geographical groupings. As the draft resolution had been adopted by consensus in informal consultations he trusted that it could be adopted by the Committee, as orally amended, without a vote.

34. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that before draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.45 was adopted he wished to comment on section IX, paragraph 4, concerning the composition of the Secretariat. The Secretariat practice, in use since 1959, of referring to the Middle East as a geographical group was incorrect. The invitation to consider adjustments to the groupings of Member States extended to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in paragraph 20 of his report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/53/375) had been opportune. He affirmed that it was time for the United Nations to abolish "the Middle East" as a designation, as he considered it to be a political rather than a geographical description. His delegation would be willing to consider the draft resolution on the basis of the most recent proposal put forward by the coordinator of the item. His delegation rejected the view that the five geographical groupings were electoral groupings which had no bearing on the composition of the groupings as set forth in the report of the Secretary-General. The groupings system should be based on a single standard. His delegation would explain its position once the draft resolution had been adopted by the General Assembly.

35. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.45, as orally amended, was adopted.*

36. **Mr. Barnwell** (Guyana), speaking in explanation of position on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the management of human resources, the Organization's most valuable asset. He regretted that it had not been possible to conclude work on the item at the main part of the fifty-third session because of the late submission of documents. The Secretariat had ample time for preparation of the relevant reports as it was a biennial item and in future all documents should be submitted on time.

37. The Group of 77 and China welcomed consensus agreement on the text, even though it did not meet all their concerns. He noted with concern that the Secretariat had not fully implemented General Assembly resolution 51/226 with regard to the recruitment of gratis personnel, and emphasized that the draft resolution just adopted should be fully implemented, as should all the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

38. The Group of 77 and China underlined the primary role of the General Assembly in the consideration of all human resources management issues, including reform. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the central role of the Office of Human Resources Management in the monitoring, approval and implementation of all human resources mandates approved by the General Assembly.

39. The Group reaffirmed its view that before further delegation of authority took place a comprehensive system of accountability and responsibility must be established, and looked forward to the report requested in the draft resolution.

40. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the recruitment of the staff of the Secretariat in accordance with the principles of Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter, in particular on as wide a geographical basis as possible. The recruitment, appointment and promotion of staff should, in accordance with the Charter, Staff

Regulations and relevant General Assembly resolutions, be without distinction as to race, sex or religion.

41. The Group of 77 and China wished to emphasize that in the award of contracts and selection of consultants the guidelines proposed by the Secretary-General, as revised by the General Assembly, should be fully implemented, and looked forward to the circulation of the guidelines with a view to ensuring full compliance with them.

42. Lastly, the Group attached great importance to hearing the views of staff representatives when proposals affecting the staff were made. In that regard the Group emphasized the need for early development of a comprehensive and systematic career development policy so as to maintain a strong and efficient international civil service.

43. **Mr. Küntzle** (Germany), speaking in explanation of position on behalf of the European Union, said that the previous three weeks had provided the first opportunity to discuss human resources management reform issues since the submission of the reform proposals in July 1997. Delegations had worked together constructively and the draft resolution just adopted was, in the view of the European Union, an important step on the way to the institutional reform of the Organization. It signalled that the Secretary-General's initiative to modernize and increase the effectiveness of the Secretariat was on track. The European Union remained strongly committed to that endeavour. In particular, the European Union welcomed the fact that the Fifth Committee had reached agreement on the issue of delegation of authority, by virtue of which the Secretary-General was authorized to further streamline administrative procedures and eliminate duplication. At the same time, accountability, which should remain the guiding principle of reform, required a strengthening of dialogue up and down the line of management. In that context the European Union reiterated its belief that reform was not an exercise in budget reduction or staff cuts.

44. Notwithstanding the importance of the delegation of authority, the central role of the Office of Human Resources Management had been recognized in such areas as human resources planning, recruitment, placement, promotion and staff mobility. In particular, the utmost importance had been attached to the ability of the Organization to attract and retain qualified young professionals.

45. With regard to the issue of gratis personnel at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, he thanked the coordinator of the item for reflecting the understanding which the Committee had reached in informal consultations. The European Union had joined the consensus on the various paragraphs in the resolution on the understanding that the personnel in question would in due course be eligible to be considered for the posts they were currently encumbering.

46. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) said that over the coming decade the Organization faced a profound demographic change, a change more dramatic than any it had experienced since its inception. It was in anticipation of that development that the draft resolution emphasized the importance of human resources planning, as well as the central role of the Office of Human Resources Management, and repeatedly requested the Secretary-General to take advantage of the opportunity to achieve equitable geographical distribution throughout the Secretariat, in accordance with one of the fundamental principles of the Organization, enshrined in its Charter. His delegation urged the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to achieve that goal, as instructed by the General Assembly. In that connection he reiterated that his delegation continued to attach the utmost importance to the national competitive examination programme, whose usefulness as a tool for identifying the best qualified candidates from inadequately represented Member States was again reaffirmed in the draft resolution. His delegation welcomed the efforts being made by the Secretariat to accelerate the placement of successful candidates from the roster and looked forward to learning in the near future that the roster had been cleared. With respect to section V, paragraph 20, of the draft resolution, and taking into account the fact that over 30 Member States were unrepresented or underrepresented in the Secretariat, the programme must be continued at the entry level. The paragraph should therefore not be viewed as requesting a simple reduction in the number of examinations, but, rather, as an effort to make the programme more efficient and effective by, for example, redesigning occupational groups with a view to encouraging more candidates from those Member States.

47. **Mr. Fedorov** (Russian Federation) referred, in connection with adapting the Organization to the challenges of the coming century, to the deeply entrenched system of permanent contracts. His delegation remained of the view that the Secretariat should give very serious consideration to the possibility of ending that practice and moving to fixed-term or indefinite appointments, which would be better for Member States, the Organization and the staff, in particular because it would provide an incentive to work. Accordingly he looked forward with interest to the Secretary-General's proposal on the establishment of a system of career appointments and fixed-term appointments, as well as the results of the International Civil Service Commission study on the use of fixed-term contracts in the Organization in the light of the latest personnel management trends.

48. In view of the financial difficulties facing the Organization, the best approach would be to apply, as far as possible, the various arrangements to attract staff approved by the General Assembly. His delegation had noted that the phasing out of gratis personnel had concluded and wished to draw attention again to the importance of the principle of seconding officials from national civil services to the United Nations, a principle confirmed in the draft resolution just adopted. He trusted that the senior officials of the Office of Human Resources Management would pay close attention to the General Assembly's request and that the Organization would make more frequent use of secondment to obtain the experts it needed.

49. The section on recruitment and placement contained very useful ideas. It was very important to do everything possible to ensure that the Organization continued to attract new skills, paying particular attention to the filling of vacancies in accordance with the Charter principles of ensuring the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity.

50. His delegation was convinced that the Organization should not train its staff too much, but, rather, attract qualified outside experts, individuals whose skills in their respective areas of expertise were up to date. Neither should the Performance Appraisal System, which, regrettably, had yet to show tangible results, be set aside. He trusted that, in the light of the recommendations by the General Assembly, the Secretariat would find a way to perfect and implement the Performance Appraisal System so that the Fifth Committee, in its future deliberations on personnel issues, could draw preliminary conclusions as to its effectiveness.

51. As for the proposed reforms of human resources management, the draft resolution just adopted took note of the Secretary-General's intent to submit proposals thereon. Those proposals should be based on the most recent decisions of the General Assembly on personnel issues. He trusted that the senior officials of the Office of Human Resources Management and those in other units of the Secretariat would take account in their future work of the provisions of the draft resolution just adopted.

52. **Mr. Nee** (United States of America) welcomed the progress made in the reform of human resources management, an integral part of the Secretary-General's reform programme. He was pleased to note that the Performance Appraisal System was functioning and that the Code of Conduct had been embodied in the Staff Regulations and Rules. Further streamlining of administrative procedures was in order to permit appropriate delegation of authority to programme managers. As reform took hold, his delegation looked to the Office of Human Resources Management to focus on setting human resources management policies and monitoring their implementation. He was pleased to note that the average time required to recruit a staff member had been roughly cut in half and urged continued efforts in that regard.

53. His delegation interpreted section V, paragraph 11, of the draft resolution taken together with the introductory remarks by the coordinator to mean that the individuals currently occupying the posts in question would be able to apply for those posts when they were advertised. It was of the utmost importance for there to be no disruption in the work of the Tribunal as a result of the draft resolution just adopted.

54. **Mr. Orr** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand in explanation of position, said that the United Nations must become a versatile, competent and results-oriented organization. Such a transformation required up-to-date and dynamic staff satisfying the fundamental requirement set forth in Article 101, paragraph 3, of meeting the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. He thus welcomed the fact that in the draft resolution just adopted the General Assembly would recognize the importance of human resources planning and request the Secretary-General to improve recruitment and placement procedures, encourage him to increase the mobility of all internationally recruited staff and urge him to increase the representation of women in the Secretariat.

55. The draft resolution just adopted was extremely long, so that the Secretariat would require a considerable amount of time to ensure that it was fully implemented. It would thus be preferable in future to prepare much shorter and more specific resolutions that established a broad policy framework, leaving day-to-day management of the Organization in the hands of Secretariat officials. Had a shorter and more specific resolution been prepared, the marathon negotiating sessions, which seemed to be ever more frequent in the Fifth Committee, could have been avoided. He trusted that the draft resolution would not prove an unintended obstacle to the Secretary-General in his efforts to attain the objective that all Member States supported: to ensure that the United Nations was stronger and more efficient.

56. **Mr. Garnier** (France) drew attention to a translation error in the French text of the draft resolution: in section V, paragraph 11, the word "current" which appeared in the English version and which had been weighed very carefully, was missing. It was a substantive omission, and the text

should be amended to read "*contrats en cours*" or "*contrats actuels*".

57. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) thanked the Coordinator for his statement in connection with paragraph 11 of section V of the draft resolution and stated that the Secretary-General would take it into account in exercising his authority under the Charter in dealing with that matter. She drew the Committee's attention to the implications of the inclusion in section V, paragraph 22, of "equitable geographical distribution" as part of the realignment of the national competitive examination and the G to P examination. The latter, unlike national competitive examinations, was not a recruitment examination, but, rather, a promotion exercise for staff already working in the Organization and the only means of promotion from the General Service to the Professional category. Hundreds of staff competed each year for a very small number of posts, and hundreds more, at their own expense, continued their education to acquire a university degree in the hope of sitting for the examination. The wording of paragraph 22 would mean that some General Service staff would be denied any opportunity for promotion because of their nationality, which had never been a criterion for promotion or a ground for denying promotion. That would be extremely damaging for staff morale, since staff in all categories should be afforded opportunities for career growth.

Agenda item 145: Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B (*continued*)

58. **The Chairman** suggested that consideration of the item should be deferred to the second part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

59. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

60. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) reiterated his request that the Arabic translation of "Office of Internal Oversight Services" should be rendered, more accurately, as "مكتب الرقابة الداخلية".

Completion of the work of the Fifth Committee at the first part of the resumed fifty-third session of the General Assembly

61. **The Chairman** declared that the Fifth Committee had completed its work at the first part of the resumed fifty-third session.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.